



Part 1

Coroners Mutual Aid Plan

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Gray Davis
Governor

State of California

Governor's Office of Emergency Services

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FOREWORD

The California Coroner Mutual Aid Plan mirrors the California Law Enforcement Mutual Aid Plan and was formerly titled “Law Enforcement Mutual Aid: Coroner’s Annex”. Both derive their authority from the California Emergency Services Act and from the State Master Mutual Aid Agreement. Coroner Mutual Aid describes the statewide Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner and Medical Examiner organization, mobilization, and functions, as well as other assistance available from the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, the California State Coroners Association, other state agencies, and the resources of the federal government. Mission statements provide functional capabilities of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, the California Department of Justice, California Department of Motor Vehicles, California Department of Health Services, California National Guard, the Office of Emergency Services, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

INTRODUCTION

This booklet consists of two parts. The first part is “The Coroner Mutual Aid Plan” (Plan) and the second is “The California Coroners Mass Fatalities Operations Guide”(Guide). The Coroner Mutual Aid Plan is intended to complement and support law enforcement activities during major disasters resulting in mass fatalities. The Plan delineates proper procedures for notification and response of coroners under the Coroner Mutual Aid Plan. The Guide is based on the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and contains position check lists for the various positions identified for Coroner Operations. The Plan supports the California Emergency Plan.

To assure an effective and efficient mutual aid response, the Law Enforcement Branch of the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services coordinates all inter-regional and state agency activity relating to mutual aid under the Coroner Mutual Aid Plan.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this plan is to:

Establish policies and procedures using the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS).

Prescribe the mutual aid organization of coroner/medical examiner personnel that can be tailored to the specific need of the Operational Area or a Region requiring assistance from other Operational Areas or Regions.

Provide for coroner mutual aid planning and joint operations. Incorporate the Incident Command System (ICS) and SEMS as per California State Law (Government Code Section 8607; California Code of Regulations Title 19, Division 2, Chapter 1, Sections 2400 to 2450 in the Disaster Assistance Act), and blend those actions with other ongoing disaster and emergency operations.

Create a standardized and accepted statewide coroner system for response and recovery related to major disaster situations resulting in mass fatalities. This system will serve as guide for mutual aid assistance that supports Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner, or Medical Examiner efforts.

DEFINITIONS

When used in this plan, various words and phrases are defined as follows:

Operational Area

A County, along with political subdivisions within that county.

Coordinator of Coroner Functions in an Operational Area

The Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner, or Medical Examiner of the county.

Mutual Aid Region

A multi-county area established by the Office of Emergency Services to facilitate coordination of mutual aid.

Coordinator of Coroner Functions in a Region A Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner or Medical Examiner nominated and elected by those vested with coroner responsibility in each Operational Area within that specific Region.

State Law Enforcement/Coroner Coordinator

The Chief, Law Enforcement Branch, Office of Emergency Services, through his designated Coroner Mutual Aid Coordinator, is responsible for administrative action and coordination between State and Regions and Operational Areas for Coroner Mutual Aid.

State of War Emergency

That condition which exists immediately with or without a proclamation by the Governor whenever this state or nation is attacked by an enemy of the United States, or upon receipt of a warning by the state from the federal government that such an enemy attack is probable or imminent. (Section 8558a, Government Code)

State of Emergency

The duly proclaimed existence of disaster conditions or extreme peril to the safety of persons and property within the state caused by air pollution, fire, flood, storm, epidemic, riot, or earthquake, or other conditions, other than conditions resulting from a labor controversy or conditions causing a state of war emergency, and which conditions, by reason of their magnitude are, or are likely to be, beyond the control of the services, personnel, equipment, and facilities, or any single county, city and county, or city, and require the combined forces of a mutual aid region or regions to combat. (Sec. 8558b, California Government Code)

Local Emergency

The duly proclaimed existence of conditions of disaster or of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property within the territorial limits of a county, city and county, or city caused by such conditions as air pollution, fire, flood, storm, epidemic riot, earthquake or other conditions which are, or are likely to be, beyond the control of the services, personnel, equipment, and facilities of a political subdivision and require the combined forces of other political subdivisions. (For Coroners this will always be their County as their Operational Area.)

Law Enforcement Branch

The Law Enforcement Branch is a Branch of the Emergency Operations, Planning, and Training Division of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services of the State of California. (This is where coordination of Coroner Mutual Aid responsibility lies.)

Unusual Occurrence

An unforeseen event involving potential or actual personal injury, death, or property damage arising from fire, flood, storm, earthquake, major transportation accident, enemy action, civil disturbance, or other natural or human-caused incident.

Disaster Mortuary Response Team (DMORT)

Disaster Mortuary Response Teams are comprised of volunteers with special skills (i.e. forensic pathologists, medical examiners, coroners, forensic odontologists, forensic anthropologists, funeral directors, medical records technicians and transcribers, dental assistants, X-ray technicians, mental health specialists, computer specialists, administrative support staff, security and investigative personnel) who become temporary federal government employees when activated through the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through its Emergency Services Function (ESF) # 8 has a provision for the care of deceased.

INCIDENT COMMAND

When applicable jurisdiction is determined, the first Deputy Coroner/Coroner on the Scene is the Coroner Incident Commander. The Incident Command System is under the umbrella of the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS).

STANDARDIZED EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) is intended to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of all emergency responders in California. The Incident Commander expands and contracts the functions of SEMS (Operations, Planning/Intelligence, Logistics, and Finance/Administration and their appropriate staffing) as dictated by the magnitude of the incident. SEMS requires emergency response agencies use basic principles and components of emergency management including ICS, multi-agency or inter-agency coordination, the operational area concept, and establish mutual aid systems.

UNIFIED COMMAND

Unified Command is comprised of jurisdictions and agencies that have a implicit/direct responsibility for the incident. The objective and strategy of Unified Command should be to reach consensus in the consolidated action

plan for the Incident. In this manner it increases the effectiveness of the response to a multi-jurisdictional or multi-agency incident.

ICS, SEMS, Unified Command applied:

ICS is the cornerstone of SEMS in an emergency incident management field level scenario. Under this system (SEMS) Unified Command must be used when emergency incidents involve multiple agencies and/or jurisdictions. The basic precept of Unified Command is that all agencies with jurisdictional responsibility for the incident will manage an incident by establishing a common set of incident objectives and strategies. This is accomplished without losing or abdicating agency/discipline authority, autonomy, responsibility or accountability. Therefore, in order for federal, state, and local agencies to be consistent with SEMS, the unified command must include all the individual authorities with response jurisdiction over the incident.

AUTHORITY

The State of California Coroner Mutual Aid Plan is developed under the authority of California state law, including: Master Mutual Aid Agreement; California Emergency Services Act (Gov. Code Section 8550 et seq.); California Labor Code, Section 3211.92 (Disaster Services Workers); Sections 2400-2450 of Title 19, Division 2 of the Code of Regulations (Standardized Emergency Management System – SEMS).

California Coroner Mutual Aid Plan

A mass fatalities incident requires that the operational responsibilities be coordinated. For this purpose, coroner mutual aid is designed to provide assistance in catastrophic situations to county governments in recovering, storing, processing, identifying, documenting and release of human remains and personal effects. Some counties (Operational Areas) may be more severely impacted based on their existing resources than other counties within their Region. For this reason, mutual aid requests are submitted to the elected/designated Coroner Mutual Aid Coordinator who either is or is empowered by the duly elected Regional Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner, or Medical Examiner.

Organization for Mutual Aid

The organizational framework for all mutual aid in the State of California is based on levels of increasing responsibility. These levels, lowest to highest, are: a) Operational Areas, b) Regions, c) State, and d) Federal.

Operational Area

Each county in California is an Operational Area, and a Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner, or Medical Examiner is its Coroner Mutual Aid Coordinator.

Region

The State of California is divided into seven Coroner Mutual Aid Regions. Each mutual aid region has a duly elected Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner, Medical Examiner, Mutual Aid Coordinator who is elected by the majority of his peers within the Region. Each Coroner Regional Coordinator will designate as alternates two senior officers within her/his department to function as the Coroner Regional Coordinator during his absence or his inability to serve.

If the Coroner Regional Coordinator position is vacated for any reason, a Regional meeting of all Operational Areas within that Coroners Mutual Aid Region (Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner, or Medical Examiner) will be called within thirty days of such a vacancy by the Chief of the Law Enforcement Branch of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services to elect a new Coroner Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator. If for any reason, a two-thirds majority of Sheriff/Coroners, Coroners, or Medical Examiners in a region desire to hold another regional election, they may make request for an election to the Chief, Law Enforcement Branch of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, who will then seek nominees and conduct the election.

State

The Governor's Office of Emergency Services is responsible for coordination and application of state resources in support of local jurisdictions. This office also is responsible for the receipt and dissemination of current information relating to existing or potential major disasters or disorders on which to base coroner mutual aid operations. The Director of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, through the Chief of the Law Enforcement Branch, and the Chief through his assigned staff, has responsibility for coroner mutual aid coordination at the state level.

Federal as represented by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

The FEMA is responsible for coordination and application of federal agencies resources, i.e., Disaster Mortuary Response Team (DMORT which is under NDMS). A federal agency is defined as any department, independent establishment, government, corporation, or other agency of the executive branch of the federal government, including the United States Postal Service, but does not include the American National Red Cross.

Procedures for Obtaining Mutual Aid

Basic Policy

The Master Mutual Aid Agreement and the California Emergency Services Act make mutual aid mandatory when the Governor proclaims a State of Emergency or State of War Emergency to exist. Mutual aid is also mandatory in situations of “local peril”. The basic policy of regional or state assistance to Operational Areas is to support Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner and/or Medical Examiner with resources after all of their resources are committed and the magnitude of the disaster is or soon will be beyond their resources and capabilities. Requests for assistance must be made through the appropriate chain of command – Operational Area to Region; Region to CA-OES (State); State to Federal Government. Requests for Federal resources will be made by the State on behalf of the requestor after the funding mechanism(s) are understood and have been agreed upon by all parties involved.

Regional Guidelines

Whenever an existing or unforeseen mass fatalities emergency is of such magnitude as to require resources from one or more operational areas, it is the responsibility of the Coroner Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator to organize and manage the committed resources within their region (Sec. 26602 of the Government Code). The Coroner Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator must keep the CA OES Coroner

Mutual Aid Coordinator apprised of the situation. Should assistance from adjoining regions become necessary, requests will be made through the CA OES Coroner Mutual Aid Coordinator who is appointed by the Chief, of the CA OES Law Enforcement Branch or through the CA OES Law Enforcement Duty Officer of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

State

If the combined resources of regions are not sufficient to cope with an emergency mass fatalities situation, or if such deficiencies are imminent, the State Coroner Mutual Aid Coordinator via the Chief, CA OES Law Enforcement Branch and he, through the Director of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, will request assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Federal Assistance usually obtained through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

FEMA may make federal resources available. In some instances and under specific circumstances, federal agencies may assist under their own authority. When any Federal resource is desired it is requested through CA-OES after a clear understanding of funding responsibility and the funding mechanism is agreed upon between FEMA, CA-OES, and the requestor.

California Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner, and/or Medical Examiner Policy
The California Coroner Mutual Aid Plan reflects the official policy of the Principals of the California Coroners Association as consistent and compatible with the Master Mutual Aid Agreement concerning coroner mutual aid planning and operations in California (as consistent with paragraph 7.a. and b. of the Master Mutual Aid Agreement.)

Basic Policies

Each Coroner Operational Area and Coroner Region within the state of California should develop a separate mutual aid response plan based on Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner, and/or Medical Examiner resource capability within that Coroner Operational Area or Coroner Mutual Aid Region and input

from the CA OES Law Enforcement Branch, Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

The regional plan should adhere to and include:

- Incident Command System (ICS)
- Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS)
- Communications plan
- Personnel alert procedures
- Resource list

Maximum use of locally existing resources must be made prior to the initiation of a mutual aid request. This is the main tenet of mutual aid operations. The responsible local official in whose jurisdiction the incident occurs will remain in charge. To assure an effective response, maximum effort will be made to provide each successive level of authority in the Coroner Operational Area and its Region with complete, current, and accurate information relating to emerging situations that may require further mutual aid or state and federal assistance.

Guidance for Mutual Aid Operations

Mutual Aid Operations are based on the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and Incident Command System (ICS). SEMS consists of five functional areas that must be considered for effective management. These functional areas are as follows:

- Management
- Operations
- Planning and Intelligence
- Logistics
- Finance/Administration

An Emergency

The governing body, or an official designated by ordinance of a county, city and county, or city may declare a local emergency. By doing so, it expands its authority, may promulgate special orders and regulations by board or council action or as provided for by the jurisdiction's emergency organization ordinance, and may re-allocate budgeted funds as necessary.

The governor may proclaim a State of Emergency or State of War Emergency to exist when he/she is requested to do so by the Chief Executive of a city, or the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors or Administrative Officer of a county or on their behalf when he/she finds that local authority is inadequate to cope with the emergency. Proclamation by the Governor makes mutual aid mandatory and state aid available.

The Governor's Office of Emergency Services through its Law Enforcement Branch will coordinate assistance as provided for in the California Coroners Mutual Aid Plan and coordinate all support provided by state agencies, by adjacent states, and by the federal government.

STATE AGENCIES RESOURCES

The following state agencies have resources which can be made available during a Mass Fatalities Incident.

National Guard

The military when authorized by the Governor and requested through OES may provide personnel and equipment necessary for collection, identification, transportation, and storage of the deceased, as well as a variety of requested support services.

Department of Justice

The California Department of Justice, Law Enforcement Division, will provide personnel to assist in the identification of deceased.

Department of Health

Under the authority of the state Health and Safety Code, the Department of Health will assist in the notification of next of kin especially where large numbers of deceased are involved and constitute a public health hazard.

Department of Motor Vehicles

The California Department of Motor Vehicles will assist in the identification of deceased by providing photographs and thumbprints from its driver license records and vehicle ownership information from its vehicle registration files. When requested, DMV Investigators will assist Coroner Investigators.

FEDERAL AGENCIES RESOURCES

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Under section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, (P.L. 93-288 as amended by P.L. 100-707), all requests for a declaration by the President that a major disaster exists shall be made by the Governor of the affected state. Such a request shall be based on a finding that the disaster is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capabilities of the state and the affected local governments and that federal assistance is necessary. As part of such request, and as a prerequisite to major disaster assistance under this Act, the Governor shall take appropriate response action under state law and direct execution of the state's emergency plan. The Governor shall furnish information on the nature and amount of state and local resources which have been or will be committed to alleviate the results of the disaster, and shall certify that, for the current disaster, state and local government obligations and expenditures (state commitments must be of significant proportion) will comply with all applicable cost-sharing requirements of this Act. Based on this request, the President may declare that a major disaster or emergency exists.

Other Federal Resources

Section 402 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (P.L. 93-288 as amended by P.L. 100-707) provides that in any major disaster, the President (through FEMA) may direct any federal

agency, with or without reimbursement, to utilize its authorities and the resources granted to it under federal law (including personnel, equipment, supplies, facilities, and managerial, technical, and advisory services) in support of state and local assistance efforts. The Federal Bureau of Investigation may assist in the identification of the deceased on its own authority without any declaration or proclamation.

Department of Defense Resources

During the immediate aftermath of an incident, the Governor may request the President to direct the Secretary of Defense to utilize resources of the Department of Defense for the purpose of performing on public and private lands any emergency work which is made necessary by such incident and which is essential for the preservation of life and property.

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

Forensic Odontology

Forensic dentists assist in special cases and during general emergency needs.

California Coroners

The California State Coroners Association will coordinate with law enforcement and abide by the Coroner Mutual Aid Plan. The association is committed to the exchange of information, expertise, training, and disaster preparation.

